

INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Indochina

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SUBJECT Views of Prominent Lao Official on Situation in Laos

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1. Internal Political Situation. The present Lao Government in Vientiane has the support of the King, of Prince Boun Oum, of the French, and of the majority of Laotians. The Laos accept the French control of the Government because of the economic advantages and because they fear future domination by the Vietnamese or the Thais.
2. Leaders of the opposition party are represented in the Government. The party is in contact with the Viet Minh and is able to carry on an active campaign against the government, because of the official immunity of their leaders. The chief of the party is in Bangkok, where he maintains liaison with Nguyen Duc Quy, Ho Chi Minh representative in Thailand.
3. Former Free Lao leaders are no longer trusted by the Laos, who consider them opportunists, working only for their own interests.
 - a) Prince Souphanavong has been discredited because of his cooperation with the Viet Minh.
 - b) Prince Petcharat has lost the support of the Laos, which he enjoyed during the French protectorate, because of his maltreatment of civil servants. Prince Petcharat is obliged to remain in Thailand because of his disagreement with Prince Savang. He accepts money from the French and the Thais, as well as from the Viet Minh.
 - c) Wichien Huangkhot has urged the Laos to continue their struggle against the Government and the French, and accuses the Americans of being imperialists.
4. Lao-Issara Government. The formation of the new Lao-Issara Government has been unconfirmed.* If it does exist, it is probably headed by Prince Souvannapouma, who hopes to head the Council of Ministers. He is now in Sam Neua.

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5. Viet Minh headquarters in Laos have not yet been identified. The three possibilities of its whereabouts are:

- a) Between Vientiane and Luang Prabang.
- b) San Neua, on the Laos-Tonkin frontier.
- c) In Champassak Province.

6. The Lao Army. The Lao Army has been recently reorganized, and totals about 10,000 troops. Only two battalions of the army have been equipped with American arms. The French, lacking arms themselves, are unable to assist the Lao forces. The slowness of American aid has surprised both the Laos and the French. The Laos are waiting for American aid in the form of money, arms, and troops. With their present equipment, the Lao Army could not possibly resist a Chinese invasion.

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9. The Laos do not consider the French their enemy, because if the French were to leave Indochina, Laos would be invaded by the Vietnamese and the Thai. Under the French-controlled Government, however, the Laos feel that their internal independence is assured.

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* Comment. The establishment of the Resistance Government of Laos, under Prince Souphanavong, was first mentioned in a broadcast of the Viet Nam News Agency on 15 October 1950. A subsequent broadcast, on 16 November 1950, stated that the National Assembly met for the first time in mid-August 1950.

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